BISHOP'S SERMON

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WILD BOAR, MOSQUITOES, AND THE MISSION OF THE REDEEMED DECEIVERS

I Peter 2:1-10 Matthew 5:13-16

I. Why mosquitoes buzz at night

An ancient Malayasian tribal legend provides this answer: In the far off olden days, a Great Spirit gave to men the knowledge of how to speak in the languages of all the other creatures in the world. Thus men were able to understand and to speak to the pigs, the birds, the lizards, and many other living creatures. People might have enjoyed this knowledge for ever, if only they had not begun to use it to tell lies to these simple creatures.

One day the Great Spirit told the people that unless they stopped telling so many lies to the other creatures, this gift of speech would be taken away from them, and they would forget how to understand and speak to any other living things except people.

Soon afterwards some of the people met a wild boar, and told him that they had a gift for him. The wild boar was very pleased and asked the people when he would be given the promised gift. "Tomorrow!" they told him. When the next day came the wild boar asked about his present, but the people really had nothing to give him, so they told the poor animal that they had lost his gift.

The people also promised the mosquitoes a gift, but when the mosquitoes asked them for it, they told the mosquitoes the same story as they had told the wild boar.

When the Great Spirit heard that the people were still telling lies to the other creatures, he decided to take away their knowledge of the creatures' languages.

The wild boar said to the mosquitoes, "I can find all I want for myself in the forest. I do not want gifts from others." So the wild boar ran into the forest, and has lived there ever since.

The mosquitoes said, "As for us, we shall ask the people every night of their lives for the gift they have promised us and we shall worry them until we get it."

So the mosquitoes started to buzz around peoples' ears at night, asking for the gift, but now the people could no longer understand what the mosquitoes were saying. The people grew angry and tried to kill the mosquitoes for worrying them so much.

The mosquitoes became angry too at this unkindness and decided that they would go on buzzing around the people every night asking for their gift, and that they would bite the people if they did not give them the promised gift. So, to this very day, the mosquitoes say, "Bz-z-z-z-z-z! Bz-z-z-z-z-z! We want our gift!"

Wild boar, buzzing mosquitoes, and the mission of the redeemed deceivers is my theme tonight.

II. Why a Church Convention?

Again, we gather in our annual church convention: Christians, labeled Episcopalians, clergy and laity, representatives of and identified with the whole ministry of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. We have come here in one place to be together: to worship, to pray, to enjoy; to discuss, to learn, to reason, to differ; to agree, to plan, to resolve; to be renewed and to be moved to action -- all this for the sake of Jesus Christ and in the love and power of the Holy Spirit. It is only for the sake of God in Jesus Christ and because of His forgiving love and the power of the Holy Spirit that we, who have deluded the wild boar and failed to recognize the buzzing mosquitoes, can gather here.

My particular expression of and consecration to Christ's ministry awards me the responsibility of preaching at this Convention Eucharist. I cannot speak for you; I can only speak to you; and only by my personal identification with and commitment to God known as Father, Son, and Spirit, may I claim to say: This is the Word of the Lord. Hear Him. This is the Word of the Lord.

III. What is the Church For?

The Church exists for God -- to worship Him and to be a sign and agent of His Kingdom. Faithfulness to God through Jesus Christ in the Spirit is the basis of her existence, the direction of all she does and the hope of all she aims to become. As God in Jesus commits himself to our humanity this essential worship directs us towards every human search for freedom, fulfillment, and joy; and brings us up against everything that distorts, imprisons, or ignores the lives, needs, and hopes of men, women, and children. Because we worship the God in His glory we are called to seek the glory of man. (Lambeth, 1978)

The vocation of the Church is clear -- to worship and to witness, to serve and to suffer. Our difficulties do not lie in doubts about this calling or in uncertainties about the truth and the power of what God reveals and offers through Jesus and in the Spirit. Our difficulties have two other sources: the way we treat the wild boar and our inability to understand the mosquitoes.

On the one hand our own sinfulness often disturbs or impedes our responses even to what we know we should do or say or be. On the other hand the vast complexities and turbulence of our world -- local, national, and international -- often leave us, even with the best of intentions, bewildered about what is going on and uncertain about what our responses should be. But we also know that God saves us from sin and is with us in the midst of our bewilderment and deception. Our sinfulness does not deprive us of the opportunities to serve God and our neighbors, nor does our frequent bewilderment leave us without indications from God as to how we are to begin to seek his will. For us the very continuing of the Church in worship, in fellowship, and in hope, amidst the realities of sin, bewilderment and deceipt is itself a sign and sacrament that there is a God in whom we trust and to whom we look for salvation. There is a God who redeems even us with our history tarnished by wild boars and buzzing mosquitoes.

IV. Worship and Mission

The Church is both "a holy priesthood" to offer God spiritual sacrifices and "God's own people" to proclaim his wonderful deeds (I Peter 2:5-9). Worship and mission are main tasks of the Church; but these functions must never be separated. Worship results in mission; mission is rooted in worship. Worship and mission, mission and worship -- both stimulate one another. Wherever we assemble as the people of God to worship Him, it is not in order to escape from the world but rather to prepare ourselves to return to it. We require a balanced combination of words and works, of witness and service, of evangelism and social action.

Evangelism will always remain a primary Christian task. For God has entrusted his Church with good news to share with the world. It is good news of his reign, which broke into the world through Jesus Christ. Then those who have received God's free gift of new life in Christ have the constant duty, joy and privilege of sharing the good news with others.

This is the spontaneous overflow of hearts filled with Christ. Yet there is also need for a thorough educating and discipling of believers both in personal evangelism and in the nurture of converts into maturity in Christ. Indeed, one of our functions is to equip God's people for their ministry in the Body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12) We must own the truth of Christ's ministry that the laity are not the helpers of the clergy so that the laity can do their job, but the clergy are the helpers of the whole people of God, so that the laity and the clergy, together, can be the Church.

Christian mission is not only confined to evangelism. Jesus did more than proclaim God's Kingdom; he demonstrated it in his own person and in his words of power and love. All human need, whatever form it took, moved him to compassion. Not only did he feed the hungry and heal the sick, but he risked his reputation by championing the poor, befriending the friendless, and including the excluded. Like Our Lord Christ and in his name, we, the Church, are called to take our stand alongside the deprived,

the disadvantaged, and the oppressed, in the strong solidarity of redemptive love. It is a legitimate - yea, an obligatory - extension of Christ's compassion that Christians involve themselves with others in the quest for more humane social and economic structures. Unjust structures dehumanize human beings; Christian compassion demands justice. Christians, mindful of their treatment of the wild boar and the buzzing of the mosquitoes, are called to witness, to be salt and light. In some situations only by prayer, suffering and the silent exhibition of Christly compassion, but in others by the resistance and denunciation of evil, by fearless witness to truth, righteousness and freedom, by pressure on public opinion, it is possible for Christians to help bring about social change, acting as the salt and light which Jesus said his followers are.

Jesus added that if it is to be effective, the salt must retain its saltness and the light must be allowed to shine (Matthew 5:13-16). He makes it clear that "being" precedes "doing"; before we, the Church, can actively engage in mission, we must be renewed for mission.

Nothing hinders the body which calls itself Christ's, both its evangelistic and its social mission, more than its failure to be what it claims to be, and to practice what it preaches.

V. The Wild Boar and the Mosquitoes

Last June, the Bishop of Pennsylvania, supported and assisted by other religious leaders, sponsored and conducted hearings on the housing crisis in greater Philadelphia. During the course of two days some thirty persons with a varied perspective and diverse orientation bore testimony, presenting information to a panel of religious leaders and representatives of the legal profession, social work, and banking. This is not the place to rehearse or even summarize the 300 pages of transcript telling a joyless tale from the two-day hearings. But it is an example of one way by which we Christians can identify the societal needs and the social turmoil by which they are expressed. At the very least we are called to be present, to listen, and to understand, and then to advocate the cause of the deprived and the oppressed. Will the wild boar ever trust us and the mosquitoes stop their buzzing?

Another good example of not repeating the wild boar affair and not responding to the buzzing mosquitoes is our Venture in Mission campaign. Hundreds of people here in the Diocese of Pennsylvania have conscientiously and responsibly identified expressions of Christian mission here in our midst, resolving to bring the redemptive love of Christ particularly to the needy and the oppressed, and they have shown us the way to translate this vision into reality. At this convention and in the weeks ahead the wild boar stands before us. In the name and love of God in Jesus Christ we must never again say: we have lost his gift.

This past year others in our diocese have not said "tomorrow" to the wild boar, but have transmitted the gift by opening a new mission congregation in Bucks County. Similar ventures should follow as the mosquitoes continue to buzz.

V. Word and Action

I conclude where our Lambeth Conference study group, concerned with mission, began. If we preach the Incarnation, then we must ourselves live by the principle of the Incarnation, humbling ourselves as Christ humbled himself,

serving as he served, and identifying ourselves with the world in its pain.

If we preach the Cross, then we must ourselves take up the Cross and follow Christ, dying to our own self-centeredness in order to live for others, loving, forgiving and serving our enemies, and overcoming evil with good.

If we preach the Resurrection, then we must ourselves live in its power, experiencing deliverance from the bondage of sin and fear of death, and eagerly expecting the completion of the new creation when Christ returns.

If we preach the Ascension, then we must ourselves submit to the universal authority of the reigning Christ, longing that every tongue should confess him as Lord and that more and more of human society should come under his rule.

If we preach Pentecost, we must then ourselves demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit in our own lives, as he forms Christ in us and binds us together in love.

If we preach the Church as God's new and reconciled community, then we must set ourselves resolutely against the re-erection of the racial, social, and sexual barriers which Christ abolished (Ephesians 2:11 ff; Galatians 3:28), and must seek his grace to become the united, accepting, caring, and supportive fellowship which he means us to be.

Incarnation; Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension; Pentecost and Church -- Word/Action -- Jesus, my Lord, my Saviour, my Life. We are deceivers redeemed, and on His mission of redemption.

May the Great Spirit give us back the linguistics of His creatures and the ability to love all He has created.